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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000527

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SUBJECT: AL ANBAR: SHEIKS' COUNCIL CHALLENGES POLICE CHIEF
APPOINTMENT, ACCEPTS MEDIATED SOLUTION

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for reasons
1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: A meeting of the Anbar Coordination Committee (ACC) was called February 12 to address the dispute between Al Anbar Salvation Council leader Sheikh Abdalsittar Abou Risha and the Anbar PC Chair and Governor over who had the authority to appoint the police chief of Anbar. While Governor Alwani insisted that "the institutions of government" chose Abdalsalam Obeidi as police chief, Sheikh Ahmed (AbdalSittar's brother and rep on the ACC) referred to the "special authority" the PM had given AbdalSittar over security matters in Anbar. Ahmed discredited Obeidi as an "outsider" and someone who would not be respected by police in Anbar. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Rafaa Essawi, who mediated the session, affirmed that Obeidi was legitimately appointed as police chief of Anbar, and proposed a compromise where the preferred Salvation Council candidate Hameed Shawka would become the special MOI "liaison" to Anbar. He also proposed the creation of a "control room" responsible for making security operations decisions that would be composed of representatives from all of Anbar. Both sides have reportedly accepted this deal. End summary.

DEBATE OVER POLICE CHIEF "LEGITIMACY"

12. (C) In January, the Ministry of Interior appointed police Brigadier General Adbulsalam Ubeidi to the top police position in Anbar. That appointment was vetted by the Anbar Coordination Committee, chaired by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Rafaa Essawi, who has played the role of mediator in Anbar affairs. Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, the brother of Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, the head of the "Anbar Awakening Council," a group of anti-insurgent Ramadi-based tribal leaders, is a member of Dr. Essawi's group. He reportedly objected last month to the Obeidi appointment, purportedly on grounds that Obeidi is not of Anbar. In private conversations with us, however, Sheikh Ahmed says that the Sattar sheikhs are opposed to Obeidi's alleged ties to the Iraqi Islamic Party. In any case, a disagreement over Obeidi spilled over into a dispute, with the provincial government supporting the appointment, while Sheikh Ahmed, speaking for the Ramadi sheikhs, opposed to it. Dr. Essawi convened a meeting of Anbar Coordinating Committee on Feb. 11 at the Prime Minister's office in Baghdad to resolve the differences.

13. (C) At the meeting, Sheikh Ahmed said that the Salvation Council refused to accept Obeidi. He had seen a copy of the MOI order and it did not appear to be issued according to correct procedure, he said. Anbar was at war, Sheikh Ahmed said, and Obeidi was not the right man for the job. He added

that Obeidi was not a popular figure and would not acceptable to the Anbari people who were fighting to improve security. He said that the Salvation Council's view must be respected, in light of the "special authorities" granted by the PM to Sheikh AbdalSittar in Anbar. (Note: It appears that the PM has in fact told AbdalSittar he would hold the title of "Special Coordinator for Counter Terrorism in Anbar".)

14. (C) A clearly frustrated Governor Alwani noted that, while he appreciated the role of the Salvation Council in Ramadi, there were many other tribes in Anbar involved in this effort - the Abu Nimr tribe in the Furat area, and local tribes in Al Qa'im all played an important role. It was not appropriate that the police chief be Ramadi (and Salvation Council) centered, he argued.

MEDIATOR PROPOSES COMPROMISE

15. (C) Dr. Essawi relayed the central government's recognition of the Salvation Council's efforts to fight terrorism. He emphasized that the GOI wanted these efforts be integrated with those of the local and central government. Essawi said he believed this was the understanding reached at the formation of the Anbar Coordination Committee last November. He affirmed that Abdalsalaam Obeidi was in fact the rightful police chief of Al-Anbar. In recognition of key role the Salvation Council played in Anbar, the central government wished to promote Hameed Shawka as the special "MOI Liasion" to Anbar province. Essawi proposed the creation of a "control room" responsible for making security operations decisions that would be composed of representatives of tribes throughout Anbar.

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Governor Alwani insisted that he had final authority to appoint members of this "control room", but would accept input from others.

16. (C) While both sides did not reach an agreement at the meeting, they have since verbally accepted the compromise solution, according to Dr. Essawi.

COORDINATION COMMITTEE IMPORTANT MEDIATION MECHANISM

17. (C) Comment: This was the second occasions in three months that Dr. Essawi was called upon to mediate a dispute between the Anbar provincial government and Sheikh Sattar's "Awakening Council." Last Nov. 4, Dr. Essawi hammered out a compromise accord between with the Provincial Council and Sattar, in which the former agreed to expand its membership to accept eight Sattarist members within the council. This recent compromise agreement demonstrates the importance of the Anbar Coordination Committee as a mechanism for resolving disputes between the Salvation Council on one side, and the PC Chair and Governor and the other. The willingness of both sides to submit to the mediation process is a tribute to Dr. Essawi's reputation as a neutral authority, with close ties to Anbar and to the central GOI. Dr. Essawi proved to be an excellent mediator, taking into account both sides and assuring them that both had the ear of the GOI. He never hesitated to disagree with either side if he thought they were being unreasonable, and encouraged all sides to cooperate for the good of the province.
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